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FLORIDA

# IFAS EXTENSION

## Rotating News Article

Week of March 27, 2006

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### ***Boating Safety***

With spring in the air, many boating enthusiasts are anxious to get out on the water to enjoy recreational activities such as fishing, swimming, water skiing, snorkeling or diving, wildlife viewing or just cruising. Florida is listed as the number two state in the country for boating accidents. According to the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission's Boating and Waterways, Florida 2004 Boating Accident Statistical Report (<http://myfwc.com/law/boating/>), Okaloosa and Bay counties were ranked in the top 10 of Florida counties for boating accidents with more than fifty reported accidents combined. Escambia and Santa Rosa ranked 18<sup>th</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup> respectively with more than 40 reported accidents.

Boating accidents can be prevented by learning proper vessel operating skills. If you are an inexperienced boater with a new boat or interested in renting a power boat, it is a good idea to take a boating safety class or online course. In Florida, those age 21 and under are required to have a Florida Boating Safety ID card when operating a vessel powered by an engine of 10 horsepower or greater (including Personal Water Crafts). In order to receive a boating safety ID card, those 21 years old and younger **must**; and inexperienced boaters **should** take a course approved by the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission and the National Association of State Boating Law Administrators (NASBLA). After completion of an approved course the FWCC will issue the boating safety ID card.

The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission offers an on-line course "**How To Boat Smart, Florida Boating Safety Course**" (<http://boat-ed.com/fl/index.htm>) to provide boaters with advice and information on safe and proper boat handling. By studying the material, you will improve your boating skills, become familiar with standard rules of the road, equipment requirements, and develop a positive attitude toward safety on the water.

In addition, organizations such as your local U.S. Power Squadron (check this website for class locations and an online course: [http://www.usps.org/localusps/d15/public\\_courses.htm](http://www.usps.org/localusps/d15/public_courses.htm)) and the U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary offer boating safety classes at various locations in our area (check here for locations and dates: [http://a0810107.uscgaux.info/boating\\_safety.htm](http://a0810107.uscgaux.info/boating_safety.htm)). These groups also offer vessel safety inspections. Taking a boating safety course increases your boating skills and knowledge of rules of the road. This not only benefits you, but the passengers you carry and other boaters.

When boating remember to use common sense and courtesy when approaching other boaters, don't operate a vessel under the influence of alcohol or drugs, file a float plan with a friend or family member (for a copy of a float plan check out:

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[http://myfwc.com/boating/safety/downloads/FLOAT\\_PLAN.pdf](http://myfwc.com/boating/safety/downloads/FLOAT_PLAN.pdf)), wear your life jacket, keep an eye on weather conditions, and know your vessel and the waterways where you operate your boat. In addition, use common courtesy when launching your boat at area boat ramps! Everyone at the ramp is as eager as you are to get out on the water. Please respect others during launching and they will respect you! Remember, boat safe, boat smart!

To report a safe boating violation or wildlife violation call Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission Law Enforcement at [1-888-404-FWCC](tel:1-888-404-FWCC).

For information on these events and volunteer opportunities, contact Chris Verlinde, Santa Rosa County Sea Grant Marine Extension Agent at 623-3868, or [christinave@co.santa-rosa.fl.us](mailto:christinave@co.santa-rosa.fl.us) between the hours of 8:00 am and 4:30 pm weekdays. Hearing-impaired individuals may call Santa Rosa County Emergency Management Service at 983-5373 (TDD).

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